

Fitzgerald

Cause #6 - The Sons of Liberty - Video, Primary Sources and Readings

“The Sons of Liberty” on The History Channel website

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/american-revolution-history/videos/sons-of-liberty>

The Sons of Liberty were truly the foot soldiers.

- They provided the ***spirit for the revolution***.
- They created a ***chain of liberty throughout the colonies***.

The group ***cut across class lines***.

- There were
  - artisans,
  - merchants,
  - lawyers.
- All came together in this common cause

They very vocal.

- They organized ***boycotts***.
- They organized ***protests***.
  - For example, they were the group beyond the dumping of tea into Boston Harbor,
    - the protest known as **the Boston Tea Party**.

They had a ***political role*** as well as an ***organizational role***.

- They turned pockets of discontent into a full-fledged movement.
- They yielded the ***threatening, coercive power*** that was needed for the revolution to succeed.
  - They could “raise the stakes,” they could “up the ante” on what it would “***cost***” to side with Britain.

One of the keys to success was to ***maintain orderly protests***,

- to ***not*** be ***anarchical***, (meaning without order or leadership)
- to ***not*** be ***overly violent***
- and to always operate within the bounds of law.

By 1774, ***committees of correspondence*** that dotted the countryside ***really began to unite these colonies***.

- The committees drew the nation together,
  - ***sharing news***,
  - ***sharing information***,
- helping unite the colonies into one nation.

This uniting really began first with the Sons of Liberty.

## Liberty Poles

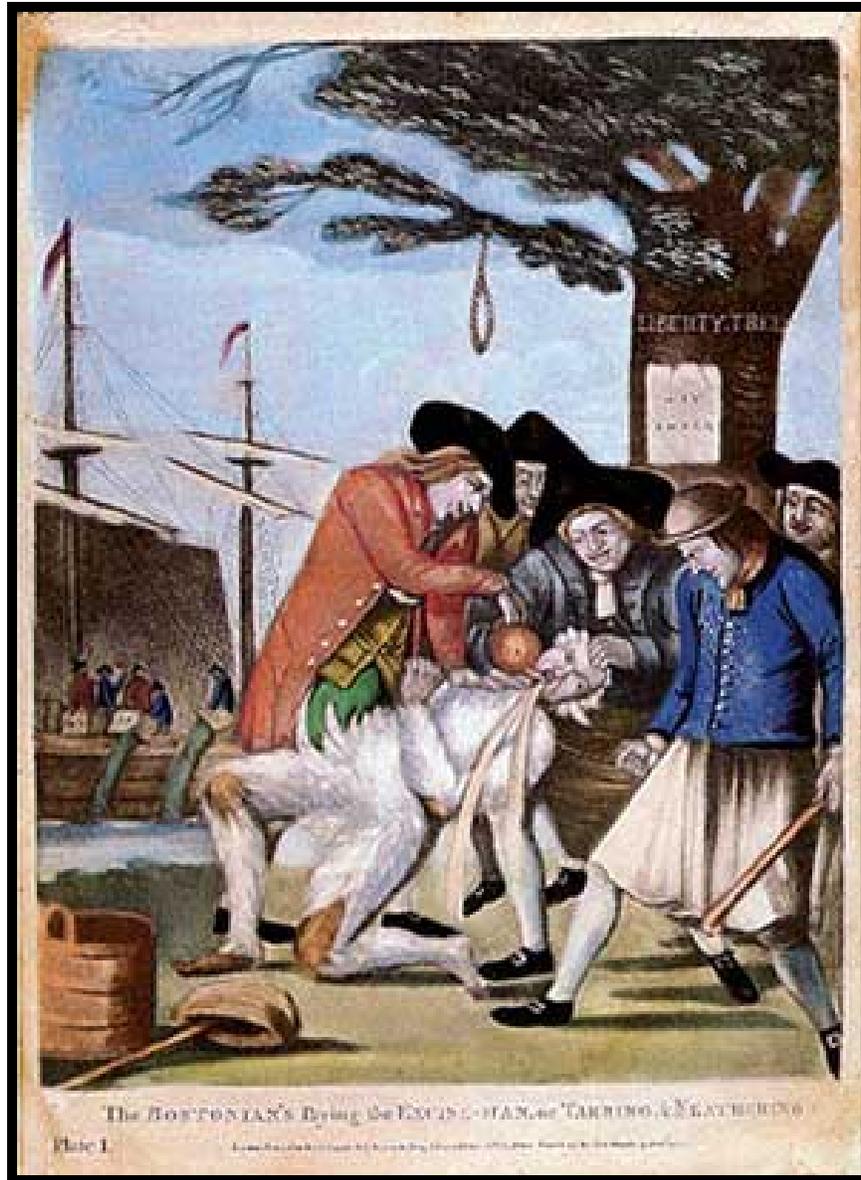
The patriots met *under large liberty trees* to protest the injustices of the Stamp Act. Whenever there *was to be a meeting, they would fly a red flag above the tree on a pole as a call for people to attend*. Where large trees were not conveniently available in public places, patriots would raise a liberty pole. Sometimes they would hang a stuffed dummy from the tree dressed to look like a tax collector, as a *threat* of what they might do to the real tax collectors.

The idea for a Liberty Pole goes back to Rome. When a slave was freed, he was given a cap to show his new status. This was called a liberty cap. Before a battle, Roman generals raised up a liberty cap on a pole as a message to slaves that if they fought with him, they would be granted their freedom. This became known as a liberty pole. In symbolism, the liberty pole is usually shown with a liberty cap on it.



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The caption reads, “Bostonians paying the Excise Man, or Tarring and Feathering.”

The original cartoon was published in a British newspaper.

**List everything you notice.**

Near the harbor

Red flags fly from the mast of the ship at the dock.

Men on the ship are dumping tea chests into the harbor.

There is a liberty hat on a pole.

There is a crowd of men, a mob?

One man is covered in feathers

A man hold his head back and his mouth open.

Hot tea is being poured down his throat

There is a noose hanging over his head.

The words “Liberty Tree” are carved in the tree.

There is a sign on the tree

The man in front has his fist clenched and holds a tool, like a hoe, in his other hand like a weapon.

## Tarring and Feathering

Adapted from “5 Myths Of Tarring And Feathering” by J. L. Bell

Published on 13 December 2013 in The Journal of the American Revolution

. . . [I]n the 1700s “tar” meant pine tar, used for several purposes in building and maintaining ships . . . pine tar doesn’t have to be very hot to be sticky. Shipyards did warm that tar to make it flow more easily, but pine tar starts to melt at about 140°F (60°C). That’s well above the ideal for bathwater, but far from the temperature of hot asphalt tar used to pave roads.

[However, ] pine tar could be **hot enough to injure someone**. The Loyalist judge Peter Oliver complained that when a mob attacked Dr. Abner Beebe of Connecticut, “hot Pitch was poured upon him, which **blistered his Skin**.” . . .

The most vicious tar-and-feathers attack in Revolutionary America was carried out on a Customs officer named John Malcolm in Boston on 25 January 1774. [**Customs officers are those who collect taxes.**] Malcolm was not only **stripped** and **covered with tar and feathers** but, another Customs officer wrote, he was also “**punched with a long pole, beaten with Clubs, led to liberty tree, there whipt with Cords, and tho’ a very cold night, led on to the Gallows, then whipt again.**” That official’s sister added, “**They say his flesh comes off his back in Stakes.**” As proof of his suffering Malcolm sailed for London with scraps of skin that had fallen off his body, some with tar and feathers still attached. It’s notable, however, that Malcolm made that voyage because *he didn’t die* . . .

Tarring and feathering **undoubtedly caused pain and a lot of discomfort** and inconvenience. But above all it was supposed to be embarrassing for the victim. Mobs performed the act in public as a humiliation and a warning—to the victim and anyone else—not to anger the community again [by continuing to collect the hated taxes.]

. . . .

The first example of such an assault in pre-Revolutionary America took place in the port of Norfolk, Virginia, in March 1766. A sea captain named William Smith wrote that seven men, including the mayor, had “bedawbed my body and face all over with tar and afterwards threw feathers upon me.” Those merchants and mariners also threw rotten eggs and stones at the captain, **carted him “through every street in the town”** with “two drums beating,” and finally **tossed him off a wharf**. The rioters had accused Smith of informing a royal official about a smuggler, though he denied that.

[The first time the act was reported in Boston was ] on 28 October 1769. A **mob** grabbed the sailor George Gailer, who had recently worked on a Customs patrol ship . . . According to the sailor, that crowd stripped him **naked, tarred** and **feathered** his skin, and paraded him around Boston in a cart for three hours, **striking him with clubs, stones, and “a hand saw.”** . . . In May 1770 another crowd in Boston tarred and feathered the Customs official Owen Richards for seizing a ship from New London, Connecticut.

A clear pattern emerges in reports of those early attacks: waterfront crowds tarred and feathered men who had busted smuggling operations once the Townshend acts were issued. The Townshend acts created the **writs of assistance** of 1767 that made smuggling and **anti-smuggling raids by Customs officials the focus of the dispute** between colonists and Parliament.

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Thus tarring and feathering was meant to **send a political message** about the colonists' anger over the **loss of their right to a warrant as well as the loss of the right to have their taxes created by their own representatives**. November 1, 1765, the day the Stamp Act was to officially go into effect, there was not a single stamp commissioner left in the colonies to collect the tax.